Interpretative visual analysis developments: state of the art and pending problems

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Bernt Schnettler & Jürgen Raab [*]

Abstract: *»Interpretative Visuelle Analyse: Entwicklungsstand und offene Probleme«*. The article offers a brief resume of recent developments in the field of interpretative visual analysis with emphasis on the German speaking area and the sociological discipline. It lays a special focus on hermeneutical and genre analysis and on research with audiovisual data. Far from constituting an already closed field, the authors stress the fact that methodological advances in qualitative research based in visual data still face a number of pending quests. This encompasses sequentiality, complexity and naturalness of videographic data, and extends to the respective methodological challenges for transcription, analysis and presentation of results.

Keywords: visual sociology; history of interpretative research; video; sociological hermeneutics; genre analysis.

1. Introduction

This text begins with a brief resume of the history and development of visual analysis in qualitative research (2), followed by a section in which we discuss the special contribution of video to the field (3). Consequently, and in order to emphasise the ongoing process of developing both adequate and practical methods, we close with some reflections on desiderates and future challenges for Interpretative Visual Analysis (4, 5).

2. Interpretative Visual Analysis: Precursors, Development and State of the Art

The particular properties and possibilities of visual data have been extensively used in the social sciences since the midst of the 19th century, especially in social and cultural anthropology, ethnology and folklore studies. Progressively, technically produced visualisations began to substitute for handcrafted illustra-

[*] Address all communications to: Bernt Schnettler, Lehrstuhl für Kultur- und Religionssoziologie, Universitätsstraße 30, Gebäude GW II, 95447 Bayreuth, Germany;
e-mail: schnettler@uni-bayreuth.de.
Jürgen Raab, Kultur- und Sozialwissenschaftliche Fakultät, Soziologisches Seminar, Kasernenplatz 3, CH-6000 Luzern 7, Switzerland; e-mail: Juergen.raab@unilu.ch.
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tions added to ethnographic texts in order to visualise, animate and illustrate scientific documents (Theye, 1989). The dynamics within the fast establishing classical field of Visual Anthropology, conceived as media supported field work, disembogued in widely known methodical approaches such as for example those of Bateson and Mead (1942), Mead (1975), Collier (1967, 1979) or, more recently, Collier and Collier (1986).

In sociology, examples of visual documentation usage can be already found between 1903 and 1915, when the American Journal of Sociology published photo plates in a series of articles either as illustrations or as documentary proof (see for example Breckinridge & Aboth, 1910; Maclean, 1903; Walker, 1915; Woodhead, 1904). After 1916, however, the increasing influence of statistical methods induced an abrupt substitution of photos by formula, charts and tables as the predominant form of appropriate scientific illustration (Stasz, 1979). Thus, important projects, situated beyond the margins of academic disciplines, proved to be decisive for the further development. For example, the famous photo-documentation on the precarious condition of mid-western rural inhabitants in the US, commissioned by the Department of Agriculture and carried out by the Farm Security Administration (Evans, 1973; Rusinov, 1942; Leicht, 2006; Mora & Brannan, 2006), were inspired by ethnological and anthropological concepts and methods. They pursued explicitly the goal of establishing Visual Sociology as a new discipline in its own right. Despite these early attempts, Visual Sociology in the proper sense was not being founded until the 1970s (Cheatwood & Stasz, 1979; Schändlinger, 1998; Stumberger, 2007). For the first time, visual data, its production, analysis and presentation were set up as core tasks within one significant discipline in the social sciences.

Its areas of research were circumscribed mainly by social problems (minorities, marginal groups, underclass environments), the analysis of role behaviour (e.g. in families) and the field of urban sociology (Becker, 1981, 1986). Visual Sociology reached its point of culmination during the 1980s, when several international journals were published on a regular basis, consecutive major conferences were held and a series of important anthologies were published. Introductory books for student came out, backed up with didactical guidebooks for teaching, and several Universities in the US offered special courses and graduate seminars to teach Visual Sociology in theory and practice (cf. Curry, 1984; Curry & Clarke, 1978; Henney, 1986) But despite the enormous efforts to broaden the field of Visual Sociology (Caufield, 1996; Harper, 1988, 1996) and to assure its institutional basis as an autonomous, specialised discipline within academic sociology, its authority was pushed back from the end of 1980s onwards, mainly by the increasingly popular and pervasive project of Cultural Studies and its corollaries, which had great success especially in the Anglo-Saxon academic communities. Also, the growing appeal of media studies and mass media research (Chaplin, 1994; Long, 1997; Mikos, 1999) diminished its strength. Likewise, in Germany attempts to institute Visual Anthro-

pology or Visual Sociology following the American examples met the same fate (Ballhaus, 1985; Taureg, 1984, 1986; Teckenburg, 1982; Wuggenigg, 1990/91), symptomatically represented by fact that the corresponding entry "Visuelle Soziologie" (Berghaus, 1989) appeared in the first, but was not included in the German Dictionary of Sociology's subsequent editions (compare Endruweit & Trommsdorff, 2002 to Endruweit & Trommsdorff, 1989).

Parallel to the precursors of Visual Sociology, researchers became increasingly aware of the pervasive impact of mass media on society during the 1940s and 1950s. Roosevelt's victory in the presidential campaign in 1932, the effects of Orson Welles radio drama "War of the Worlds" in 1938 or the deliberate use of film for propagandistic purpose by the fascist regimes of Hitler and Mussolini activated broad empirical research and theoretical reasoning on open and covert, explicit and implicit media effects like seduction, manipulation, and demagogy (Merton, 1946; Packard, 1958). Political and commercial advertising was subjected to significant observation, and it was in this context, when Marshall McLuhan formulated his favourite thesis on communication that "the medium is the message" (McLuhan, 1964). Ultimately, the audiovisual media coverage about the Vietnam War strikingly demonstrated the pervasive influence that politically relevant images and copious public circulation exerts on public audiences in modern mediated societies.

In the growing field of social research on media reception and content studies (Bonfadelli, 1980), one of the major preoccupations were directed to study the forms of media production and consumption rapidly disseminated throughout all segments of modern society and present in all social strata. These studies focused primarily on media's socialisation effects and gave special attention to violence. But some qualitative studies followed narrower paths away from the broad motorways of normal science, studying the use of cameras in everyday life, decisively propagated from the 1960s onwards by the popularisation of cameras (Bourdieu et al., 1965/1981) or the similarly increasing dissemination of commercial advertisements, which began to infiltrate people's lives around that period (Goffman, 1979). They discovered mundane aestheticisation practices which varied markedly from milieu to milieu and stereotyped medial forms of presenting gender, respectively. Subsequently, research topics were extended to the study of particular popular television genres and their corresponding presentational form, like commercials (Kotelmann & Mikos, 1981), news (Keppler, 1985), films (Kepplinger, 1987), or daily soaps (Rössler, 1988).

The end of "mass production" (Piore & Sabel, 1989) in the economy at large and in consumer culture in particular also had severe effects on the "reality of mass media" (Luhmann, 1995): Social differentiation in milieus, the fragmentation of media audiences into segments and multiple target audiences, along with an increasing "democratisation" of the communication media closed down the hitherto dominant "sociology of mass communication's" era (Hunziker, 1988; Maletzke, 1988). Individualisation and the imminent rise of a communi-

cation society with multiple options translocated many of the former approaches under the increasingly compelling broad umbrella of the new Cultural Studies (Chaplin, 1994; Long, 1997; Mikos, 1999).

Following the cultural turn, post-disciplinary projects within the Anglo-Saxon Cultural Studies, strived for the constitution of a "novel cultural science of images" [Bildkulturwissenschaft] (Holert, 2000) under the "umbrella heading" Visual Culture and Visual Studies (Bryson, Moxey & Holly, 1991; Evans & Hall, 1999; Jenks, 1995; Mirzoeff, 1999; 1998; Sturken & Cartwright, 2001; Walker & Chaplin, 1997). Besides repeated criticisms concerning both its implicit socio-political claims and the insufficient methodological instruments of discourse analysis (Bal, 2002), one of its indisputable merits was understanding that professional and scientific realms, as well as everyday and occupational activities, are realised through and depend increasingly on audiovisual media.

This idea bears decisive consequences for current research on, and with, visual and audiovisual data. It implies that professional understanding in sociology – that is: analysis and interpretation – not only with respect to its research objects and its social fields, but also in conceptual, methodological and methodical terms has to supersede and develop beyond "classical" notions of sociological media and communications research (cf. paradigmatically Albrecht, 1991; or recently: Denzin, 2000; Hunziker, 1988; Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001; Loizos, 2000; Rose, 2000). However, methodical traditions and competence in analysing visual and audiovisual data remains underdeveloped and deficient in Sociology, compared, for example, to the longstanding and well-establish tradition of ethnological film in Anthropology. At best, one has to recall the work of Ray Birdwhistell (1970), who was one of Erving Goffman's teachers, or Albert Scheflen and Adam Kendon's "context analysis" (Kendon 1990). Building upon and continuing the trendsetting studies of the Palo-Alto-group, composed by Frieda Fromm-Reichmann, Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson, who analysed a short clip (the „Doris-film"), and a second strand, the Natural History Approaches (Pittinger, Hockett & Danehy, 1960), Birdwhistell, Scheflen and Kendon developed a way of analysing interaction which can be denominated as sociological in the strict sense. Whereas Ekman and Friesen's (1969) path-breaking studies in Psychology were concerned with individual forms of emotional display, they focused in their studies with film on social interaction, a subject that is also studied in Comparative Ethology, although under a different methodological orientation (Eibl-Eibeslfeldt, Schievelhövel & Heeschen, 1989).

The gradual introduction and social dissemination of video technologies at the turn of the 1980s provided for a manifest expansion of research objects and a substantial increase of analytical facilities. Whilst in Psychology, predominantly standardising and quantifiable methods were established (Koch & Zumbach, 2002; Mittenecker, 1987), in Sociology a strong orientation toward quali-

tative methods of video-analysis developed, as a way of returning to the classical issues and tasks of interaction research. Goodwin's seminal studies (1981, 1986), in which he applied video-analysis to interaction phenomena, thus far exclusively studied with acoustic means, systematically explored the role of visual aspects for interactions. At the same time, Christian Heath (1986) published his video-analysis of doctor-patient interactions. Heath's work was pivotal for the foundation of a new research area, focusing on interaction in high-tech work environments using video analysis: usually known as Workplace Studies (Heath, Knoblauch & Luff, 2000). He is among the few who have developed new methodological principals and original methods of video-analysis (Heath, 1997; Heath & Hindmarsh, 2002). The studies of Lucy Suchman played an important role in the creation of the Workplace Studies, for example with her research on airports, in which connected activities, in four dislocated but interlinked work areas, were videotaped and analysed (Suchman & Trigg, 1991). Control centres, operation rooms and surveillance headquarters were extensively studied, recently Workplace Studies has oriented to other fields like interaction in museums, galleries and auctions (Heath & Vom Lehn, 2004), hospitals and operation theatres (Schubert, 2002, 2006a), architectural offices and scientific laboratories (Amann & Knorr Cetina, 1988; Mohn, 2002). Also, several reflexive methods have been applied. Holliday (2000), for example, asked her research subjects to operate the camcorder on their own and document their everyday activities as video diaries. In a cognate area – the sociology of work – the visual sociology in France evolved, even founding a new journal ("Champ Visuelles") (Lacoste, 1997). Of special importance for video-analysis are the studies of Mondada (2003, 2005).

The advancement of methodology and methods has been dominated recently – besides those derived from semiotics (for example Barthes, 1985; Eco, 1985; see also the criticism in Hahn, 1991; Jayyusi, 1988; Metz, 1972) – mainly by a tradition following the communicative paradigm in the new sociology of knowledge (Knoblauch, 1996; Luckmann, 1997, 2006a) building on sociolinguistics and extending this approach to the analysis and interpretation of audio-visual data. The theory of communicative genre, originally developed for the interpretation of oral genres (Günthner & Knoblauch, 1995; Knoblauch & Luckmann, 2004; Luckmann, 1986) was translated into a method for research on mass media forms of communication and applied to the values, activity pattern, differences in status and gender, the aesthetic styles of different milieu, and worldviews (Ayass, 1997; Keppler, 1985; Knoblauch & Raab, 2001; Willems, 1999).

Around the same time as Goodwin and Heath, Luckmann and Gross initiated a project using video data for interaction research (Luckmann & Gross, 1977), which gave rise to the concept of interaction scores (Bergmann, Luckmann & Soeffner, 1993; Luckmann, 2006b), taken up recently by video-hermeneutics (Raab & Tänzler, 2006; Raab, 2008). Also, within the herme-

neutical tradition, initially applied mainly for the interpretation of texts and conversations, this methodological approach progressively turned to other materials, as images and forms of visual mise en scenes, indexing the historically changing forms of expression, perception and presentation that are beyond oral conversation and texts. This notion was taken up in different hermeneutical approaches, like structural hermeneutics (Englisch, 1991; Haupert, 1994; Loer, 1994; Müller-Doohm, 1993, 1997; Tykwer, 1992), hermeneutical sociology of knowledge (Hitzler & Barth, 1996; Pfadenhauer, 2001; Reichertz, 1994; 2000; 2001), or sociological hermeneutics (Raab, 2001, 2002; Raab, Grunert & Lustig, 2001; Raab & Tänzler, 1999, 2002; 2006; Soeffner, 2000, 2001; Soeffner & Raab, 2004; Tänzler, 2000, 2001) and similar approaches, which try to synthesise the aforementioned and other approaches and methods within a general theoretical sociology of knowledge frame (Bergmann et al., 1993; Bohnsack, 2001, 2005, 2008; Guschker, 2001; Schnettler, 2001). In the meantime, video-analysis has been extended to other areas of social research. Videography (Schubert, 2006a, 2006b) focuses on technological usage in professional contexts and the forms of interaction and interactivity between human and technical devices. Video is also applied in other institutional areas, such as interaction in schools and educational institutions, social gatherings or theatrical events, and performative interactions (Wagner-Willi, 2006; Wulf et al., 2001).

Another important segment is video-based communication technologies, which are employed in long distance communication (Körschen, Pohl, Schmitz & Schulte, 2002) among which video-conference are probably the best known. Despite great expectations, it has not matched its exorbitant future promises because of serious technical problems and the constrictions of mediated communication. But the incipient subsequent technological leap including UMTS might stimulate a dramatic shift in communication usage, including video-messaging-services and mobile video-based communication, although expectations concerning a supposed "perpetual visual contact" (Koskinen, 2004) as facilitated by new technological devices like visually supported mobile phones may remain an unachievable future vision. However, the production and usage of moving images, for the purposes of communication, challenges users by generating a series of novel opportunities and problems, which may be properly studied by social scientists with the aid of videographic inquiry.

Finally, video-analysis was propelled forward by another important change in public use and application of visual technologies, which in Germany was introduced first with a certain reticence, but has then pervaded rapidly into vast segments of the public, commercial, and even the private sphere: video-surveillance and CCTV systems. These systems were set up to record, sometimes to collect and store, video data in diverse settings like observation centres and control rooms, where video recordings are systematically sifted and analysed. Beyond important ethical and legal implications, methodical question

and challenges for sociological analysis arise from that practice, with respect to the extraction and combination of images, above all concerning how images are to be interpreted, especially with respect to its relevancies for inducing decisions and orientations subsequent action (Fiske, 1998; Fyfe, 1999).

3. The Role of Video-Analysis for Qualitative Research

Video-cameras, camcorders and webcams offer novel modes of data collection for the social sciences. These devices do not only allow for a comprehensive documentation of social action and interaction. Moreover, they provide researchers with new qualities and quantities of data. Therefore, some authors have euphorically proclaimed a "Video-Revolution" for the social sciences (Secrist, De Koeyer, Bell & Fogel, 2002), given the possibility of recording and analysing interactive processes with a high level of detail and, simultaneously, from different perspectives, in order to subject them to microscopic scrutiny. It is argued that this technological advance might induce a similar innovative force in the methods of interaction research that the invention and popularisation of audio-recording devices did, some decades before, for the rise of ethnomethodological studies in conversation analysis (Garfinkel, 1967; Ten Have, 1999; Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1973).

The omnipresence of video in our culture is striking. However, despite the wide diffusion and general acceptance of video-recordings both within current everyday life and a series of institutional areas within our society, the related scientific research with video data continues to advance relatively slowly. Although video-data is gaining growing relevance for qualitative studies, the development of adequate and convenient methods still remains in its initial phase (see however the contributions collected in Knoblauch, Schnettler, Raab & Soeffner, 2006), despite the flourishing theoretical effort dedicated to visuality, and reasoning on visual culture in Humanities and in Social Sciences. Although there are already a wide array of existing methodological approaches for visual data in general (cf. for example Banks & Morphy, 1997; Davies, 1999; Emmison & Smith, 2000; Hessler, 2005; Pink, 2001), there is considerably less methodological debate about the specifics of video-data. Note that, for example, in Visual Ethnography, video-analysis plays only a secondary role (Pink, 2007) or is simply neglected (Rose, 2007).

Nonetheless, video-data is already employed in a wide array of research areas within the social sciences and especially in qualitative studies. Today, video-analysis is used in studies such as medical interactions, (Heath, 1986), in visual ethnographies of work and technology (Knoblauch, 2000), in workplace studies focusing on highly mechanised centres of coordination like airport control rooms (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996), underground subways (Heath & Luff, 1996) and other areas of the famous Anglo-Saxon "workplace studies" (Heath, Luff & Knoblauch, 2004; Luff, Hindmarsh & Heath, 2000) or in the

study of tele-cooperation (Meier, 1998). Video-analysis is also applied in diverse areas like religion (Bergmann et al., 1993; Schnettler, 2001), medical sociology (Mondada, 2003, Schubert, 2006c), interaction in schools (Aufschnaiter & Welzel, 2001), in museums and art galleries (Heath & Vom Lehn, 2004; Vom Lehn, 2006), in auctions (Heath & Luff, 2007), in studies of technology and innovation (Rammert & Schubert, 2006), in memory research (Baer, 2005) or in applied qualitative market research (Schmid, 2006), to name but a few selected examples of a rapidly increasing area within qualitative studies.

The fact of video's popularity is, however, framed by a number of fundamental methodological questions which have not been discussed to the extent a proper methodological debate would require in order to allow a conscious and professional legitimated application of this new research instrument. Among the most demanding problems pending are questions like: what characteristics and properties of video data are to be taken into consideration by social scientists at the different stages of the research process? Do we have to distinguish between different types and qualities of video data? What expertise do we already have at our disposal in recording, preparing, transcribing, analysing, interpreting and presenting audiovisual data? Despite the growing interest in visual research in general, there has been relatively little debate on the specific methodological demands of interpretative video analysis.

Interpretative video-analysis is a quite recent, though rapidly expanding innovation in social science methodology. Today, it is used in a wide range of fields in sociology and cognate disciplines. Apparently, video data shows a number of benefits for social research. Video seemingly conveys insights into unknown features of the social world. It provides researchers with comprehensive recordings of the successive unfolding of social interactions and with detailed audio-visual data of their embedding in existing social situations, settings and worlds.

Visual analysis' current condition in sociology and related disciplines calls for an advancement of the reasoning on adequate methods and proper theoretical approaches, because the social sciences have – at best – marginalised visual data, if not neglected them. There are two main reasons which might explain this underestimation and the corresponding poor level of qualitative methodology and methods with respect to an understanding and interpretation of images: Firstly, the impact of a substantial prehistory of social scientists' self-restriction to language and texts while simultaneously disregarding the veracity, expression, the formative and narrative power of images (Goody, 1981; Goody, Watt & Gough, 1986). Certainly, images were conceived as warrants for the dissemination of traditions, beliefs and knowledge during centuries in our culture – and certainly not only in our culture – even if they were not accompanied by any text (Gombrich, 1984). Distrust in the allegedly insurmountable ambiguity of images arises at the time when literacy and texts became warrants of inter-

subjectivity and "objectivity", because not only in the process of focalisation on text, reading image interpretation skills were progressively lost, but there was also a relative blindness initially towards the multiple meanings or ambivalence of texts.

A second reason lies in the different "nature" of images and texts. This difference has been already emphasised by Karl Mannheim (1964) from sociology of knowledge perspective and this distinction was taken up by Susanne K. Langer (1941), a disciple of Ernst Cassirer, with categories she denominates as "discursive" vs. "presentational symbolism". Langer maintains that language is characterised by the fact that it can only express details inserted within a certain order: the discursive order, which is the linear and successive sequence of significant meaning units into a broader meaning complex. "[…] any idea which does not lend itself to this 'projection' is ineffable, incommunicable by means of words" (Langer, 1941, pp.80f.). Images, on the contrary, are characterised by a simultaneous and integral, therefore "presentational symbolism". The totality of images encloses all meaning elements which constitute the symbolic unit as a whole and represents them all at once. This bears two consequences: On the one hand, the specific meaning of each single element can only be understood by, and through, the meaning of the whole, by its relations within a holistic structure. On the other hand, the exclusion of language-specific restrictions like linearity and succession allows for the communication of ideas, intentions and stances which may not – or only barely – be speakable using the symbolic system of language or which would lose their potential particular meaning if using language instead of images (cf. esp. Imdahl, 1980; Raab, 2007).

However, as part of the growth visualisations and mediatisation in contemporary society, technological media like photography, film, television, video and computers, and the corresponding images they spread, are becoming primary forms of knowledge communication, especially for understanding and interpreting historical, social and cultural realities. There are nearly no historical, social or political topics, issues, processes or events left which cannot be immediately documented, then elaborated and finally communicated by the media. This development is reaching its culmination in the spread of surveillance cameras, the connection of visual recording devices with computers and the miniaturisation and multiplication of digital hybrid media like camera phones.

This novel quality and quantity of audiovisual media and their proliferating images have provided quite different responses, ranging from severe condemnation of the corrosiveness of the vanishing influence of the printed word (Postman, 1985), passing by the fear of an encompassing "industrialisation of vision" signifying a fundamental attack on human nature (Virilio, 1989, 1996) and the complete loss of human perception, reasoning and communication faculties (Baudrillard, 1978, 2003; Flusser, 1997) to the vivacious qualification

of audiovisual media as privileged trans-anthological cultural techniques (Stephens, 1998; Weibel, 1987, 1993).

Beyond exaggerated euphoria, cultural pessimistic criticism and metaphysical visions of doom, the "flood of images" has also engendered broad theorisation of the significance of media and images for interaction in everyday life. This comes along with accompanying reflexions and discussions on the methodological and empirical labour with images and visual media. The bases of these efforts are rooted in the insight that we apprehend our world by interpretation and meaningful action, using changing forms of symbolic production and symbolic understanding, through which we have to continually create new gateways to our world. Therefore, it is not only members of a certain culture that have to appropriate the increasingly complex forms of expression and meaning structures by establishing new ways of interpreting them. Moreover, the social sciences cannot avoid that something is becoming a subject of its methodologically controlled data production and analysis. The thing that not only shapes, but inherently determines the experience and memory, the knowledge, action and imagination of social and historical understanding and is determining it increasingly: the audiovisual media along with its images.

At least in the wake of Cultural Studies' success, visual analysis has become a fixed element beyond those disciplines traditionally occupied with visual forms like art history and media studies. The reasons for this are, without doubt, manifold, but surely three factors have had a decisive influence: (a) the end of the logocentric paradigm, (b) the massive dissemination of visual media, and (c) the proliferation and easy access to visual devices in scientific research practice during the last decade. On the one hand, the growing use of visual forms of presentation has been stated in large number of scientific disciplines (Heintz & Huber, 2001). On the other hand, visual techniques of data production are increasingly employed in the sciences. This growing relevance of visual and audiovisual forms is intimately related to technological innovation, a process in which the social sciences are obviously benefitting from a general trend towards audiovisual recordings, which has come with a rapid miniaturisation and technical improvement of the corresponding video equipment (better resolution quality, and capacity). Lower prices for increasingly powerful cameras have undoubtedly accelerated this process. Digitalisation, has not only improved the quality of audiovisual recordings, but enabled the storage and handling, including sharing electronic data within distributed research networks.

4. Desiderates and Future Challenges for Interpretative Video-Analysis

Within a culture progressively shifting from literacy to visuality, video recordings are widely regarded by its members as "natural", "holistic", self-

evident and taken-for-granted representations of social occasions and events. For social scientists however, video-data is the most complex, "multimodal" data used in qualitative studies so far. Although technical innovations over the last decade have significantly simplified its use, interpretative research with video-data still requires sophisticated methods of analysis. Today, we witness a growing interest in interpretative research with video data – a fact that calls for deepening the discussion of its methodological problems. Unlike other kinds of data the use of video in social research seem to foster a certain fusion – or confusion – of data collection (recording) with data analysis and interpretation, as well as with the presentation of results which may lead to severe methodical problems.

For this reason and in order to discuss separately the pertaining problems of each area, we will consider the following three aspects that correspond to different stages in research with video data:

- Generation of video data: Video-based explorations of social worlds and relevant methodological and practical challenges for data generation include problems of field access, recording permission, solutions for legal, ethical and technical restrictions.
- Methods of data analysis and interpretation as developed in the areas of ethnomethodological video-analysis, video-hermeneutics, video-interaction-analysis, video-performance-analysis, that lay the bases for combining or renewing existing approaches.
- Presentation of results in video-based interpretative research, which extend to criteria for the selection, preparation and publication of results and new ways of integrating video-data into established and accepted forms of publishing scientific results.

From a methodological and methodical viewpoint, the following aspects are of special relevance for Interpretative Video-Analysis.

4.1 Mimetic properties and constructedness

The "mimetic" character of audiovisual recordings supports – in contrast to standardised research forms using video – attempts to record social situations as exact and "undistorted" by the researchers as possible (Herbrik & Röhl, 2007). The mimetic property of video does not imply a fundamental epistemological position, but results from the quite mundane domain of research practice. Video recordings allow for a technically quick and facile production of "documents", available as a pre-embedded skill in everyday practice. Emphasising this "natural social positivism" in mundane video usage does, however, by no means equate to a methodological standpoint which equates with a similar belief in the "positivistic" features of video data at the level its social scientific usage. We do not hold the conviction that video actually would produce "authentic", undistorted, complete records of mundane situations. However, we

share the member's view in the sense that video – except in quite rare cases – is supposed to be showing records of mundane situation which actually have taken place and are – more or less – well represented by the audiovisual material. They are, at least, documents of a certain situation to some extent and are constituted by a categorical difference from data which has been produced "artificially" exclusively for research purposes, as this is the case in data generated in laboratories (cf. Knoblauch, 2004 for a further debate on different videographic data-types).

The initial enthusiasm for employing video data in qualitative studies has been subjected to fundamental criticism concerning the naturalistic naïveté of this instrument of investigation. Mainly within anthropology, this issue has been widely discussed, as part of a broader epistemological reflection on the legitimacy and adequacy of investigating exotic cultures by western scientists. Known as the "crisis of representation" it has sharpened the awareness of the constructedness of any data social scientists produce and analyse. Constructedness, nevertheless, is not equivalent to invention or creation ex nihilo. To characterise video as naturalistic data means to recognise both its conservation a wide range of aspects of the original situation, and its construction by the scientist mediated through video technologies. Selection and focussing are the two main procedures by which the scientist intervenes in the data construction (Amann, 1997; Berg & Fuchs, 1993).

Researchers understand that video-recordings do not of course capture the "world-as-it-happens" and they recognise that like all methods of data collection they are not without their problems and difficulties. Firstly, video-recordings provide a version of the event and cannot be ascribed some ultimate objective status (Heath & Luff, 2000; Knoblauch, 2001). Secondly, field observations play a critical part in the research. The video-camera does not by any means replace the observer. On the contrary, the body of video-data has to be substantially augmented by observational data. Therefore, whilst the recordings are produced the researcher takes notes that later enrich the analysis of the video-data. And thirdly, they take particular care to reduce any reactivity of the data collection. Drawing on studies that investigate the reactivity of people to camera they place the recording device in some distance to the action. Research has pointed out that depending on the proximity between the video-camera and the observer the use of video-cameras is less obtrusive than participant observers (Smith, Mcphail & Pickens, 1975).

The problem of reactivity, a current issue in methodological debates, certainly requires a more extended discussion, albeit under the auspices of cultural acceptance mentioned earlier and everyday practices of audiovisual media and, in particular, of video recordings. It is similarly accepted that every video recording factually encloses constructive aspects of those operating the camera, be they lay people or researchers. Their footprints are left in the specific selection of camera position, perspectives or groups etc., which are also being

documented in the material. In order to avoid the vicious circle of infinite epistemological regress – to which fundamental argumentation may lead, as a number of debates following the "crisis of representation" have vividly shown – it is necessary to discuss these limits in relation to the changing conditions of on the one hand, social change in everyday life and on the other, the pragmatic needs of research.

4.2 Complexity

Video recordings produce data with a high degree of complexity. The sheer amount of data is a challenge in its own right. A few minutes of recording produce a large quantity of visual, kinaesthetic, acoustic etc. impressions, which have to be transcribed and prepared for analysis. Hence, an analytic and methodological framework is required that helps the researcher to deal with this complexity. One approach to analyse video-data derives from Ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967) and Conversation Analysis (Sacks, 1992). The complexity of audiovisual data – only approximately defined by the three forces mentioned earlier – constitutes an enormous potential for this communicative form, not only in aesthetical terms, but as a challenge for the social sciences' practises of analysis, interpretation, and understanding. Visual media like camcorders and webcams are multifunctional instruments which enable a wide array of potential usages, including their conscientious application for data production in qualitative research.

The relative neglect of video in the social sciences is sometimes attributed to its complexity and abundance. Video data is certainly among the most complex data in social scientific empirical research. It is multi-sensual and sequentially ordered, enclosing both diachronic and synchronic elements, e.g. speech and visual conduct, gesture, mimic expressions, representation of artefacts and the structure of the environment, as well as signs and symbols. Moreover, it represents aspects related to recording activity itself, such as the angle and the focus of the camera, the cuts, and other elements pertaining to the activity of filming and editing. Hence, video recording generates an extraordinary abundance of data, confronting the researcher with the problems of data management, retrieval and selection. This may not only cause data overload, but also raises the question of how to select sequences appropriate for further microanalysis. It might also be the case that the quality of the recordings may be detrimental to analytic purposes. There may be interesting parts of video that cannot be selected for further scrutiny due to, for example, recording problems (wrong perspective, malfunction, blurriness, people running through the image, etc.). Beyond such obvious practical restrictions, the methodological problem of what constitutes the unit of analysis and how to assure a balance between time-consuming microanalysis and an overview over the whole data corpus remain open questions for future methodological debates.

4.3 Naturalness

In contrast to – for example – research designs using video within experimental settings or artificial situations (Mittenecker, 1987), interpretative video-analysis prefers "natural" data and social situations which have not been specially set up for research. Arranged situations or quasi-experimental settings may only be used in certain limited cases, as for example in studying the use of interaction with novel technical devices (Finn, Sellen & Wilbur, 1997; Luff et al., 2007) "Natural data", however, is not identical to data found by natural scientists. All video analysts agree in the interpretative character of their data. By natural data we mean that the recordings are made in situations affected as little as possible by the researchers (Silverman, 2005). Natural data refers to data collected when the people studied act, behave and go about their business as they would if there were no social scientists observing or taping them. There is no doubt that the very presence of video technology may exert some influence on the situation that is being recorded, an influence commonly labelled "reactivity" (Laurier & Philo, 2006; Lomax & Casey, 1998). Nevertheless, many studies show that the effect of video becomes negligible in most situations after a certain phase of habituation. The stress on the naturalness of data should, however, not be understood as a total neglect of other kind of situations. Interviews or even experiments may also be subjected to video analyses, the general assumption being that they are not as a result taken to represent something else (i.e. what is talked about in the interview), but only as what they are: interviews or experiments. In general, however, video analyses turn to more vernacular situations: people at work, people in museums, people sitting in a café etc. It is this orientation towards "natural situations" that leads video analysts to sympathise strongly with ethnography, particularly the kind of ethnography which turns towards encounters, social situations and performances as championed by Erving Goffman (1961, 1967, 1971). In order to distinguish this ethnographically oriented video analysis from other standardised forms of video analysis, it seems therefore quite reasonable to refer to it as "videography" (Knoblauch, 2006).

4.4 Sequentiality

The enormous advantage of video data consists in its inherent sequential order. Social situations, interactions and processes are not only observable in a wide range of perspectives, but also transformed into data that still enclose the sequential unfolding of the recorded events or interactions. Video provides an opportunity to capture participants' actions and activities and subject them to repeated scrutiny using slow-motion facilities and the like. They give access to the sequential, moment-by-moment production of talk and visual conduct as it emerges – details which are unavailable to methods like observation or interviewing. Video-recordings also provide researchers with the opportunity, at

least in public settings such as colloquia and conferences, to show and discuss analytic observations with regard to the data themselves (Heath & Hindmarsh, 2002). The discursiveness of this media technology, especially through the possibility to rewind and fast forward, enables repeated investigation of scenes and interactive sequences in great detail and without loss of quality. Digital video enables a simplified usage in comparison with older technology such as super-8 or VHS, allowing for manipulability of reproduction at high levels of detail. This constitutes the basis for the methodological advantage of video because it allows detailed microscopic investigation of complex interactions. Slow motion and amplification of segments allow a "microscopic" look at details that may be out reach of the participant's viewpoint and therefore might pass unnoticed using other methods, and, in particular, it allows consideration of the successive unfolding of interactive sequences and appreciation of the interrelation between elements that might be inobservable to the naked eye. Likewise of specific relevance for analytical work with video data are features including freezing of images, accelerated or decelerated reproduction speed, splitting audio from video, etc. Moreover digitalisation allows faster cutting out of relevant sequences, editing and annotating or comparing different diachronic sequences synchronically (as in split-screen arrangements, cf. Mondada, 2005, Peräkylä & Ruusuvuori, 2006).

Although sequentiality can have various meanings – particularly in the divergent uses of the term by hermeneutics and conversation-analysis – the parallel between the sequentiality of the medium and the sequentiality of social activities is fundamental to video analysis. Since all approaches are interpretative, the analysis is built in one way or the other on what may be called „ethno-hermeneutics". They also share the methodological conviction that interpretive analysis of video-data requires more than "visual empathy" combined with descriptive "structured microanalysis" as Denzin (2000) suggests. Sequentiality is one of the inherent characteristics bearing special relevance for the analytical potential of video data. Unlike other images – think of paintings, photography or graphics – video and filmic data have a genuine sequential structure. This property can be examined from two complementary perspectives: The first aspect of sequentiality lies in the continual temporal succession of movements within a single take, what has been from its beginnings one of the most fascinating qualities of film, as documented in examples from early cinema. While this may be limited to a fixed camera, the second aspect adds a further quality as expressed by the mobilisation of camera itself, in the shifts and zooming, dynamising the images and producing new temporal and spatial modulations. Cutting and editing are of major importance in this respect, because together with the moving camera they enable the separation of scenes and the production of continuity, as one of the basic narrative filmic devices (see Laurier, Strebel & Brown, 2008 for an insight to the complex task of professional editing practice).

In this sense, the ongoing separation, (re-)combination and permutation of perceptual instances transforming and rearranging meaning structures, or courses of action and interaction, is constitutive for those audiovisual data which have been edited. Cutting and editing determine the organisation of space and time and constitute central elements of showing and narration, which means visual-cognitive efforts of interpretation, because they guide and direct the spectators' gaze and reception, and, ultimately, frame their understanding and interpretation. In addition to the aforementioned aspects, which can be subsumed in general to the problem of continuity and succession of moving images, exists a third aspect of sequentiality: Hidden by the simultaneity of images and sound, there have been attached to moving images from the very beginning of media, voice, musical, sound, commentaries and dialogue.

4.5 Transcription and analysis

No doubt, the relation between the spoken and the visual is of general epistemological importance and the relation between text and image needs to be clarified. In the case of video analysis, however, this issue exhibits a very practical aspect: the transcription of data inscribes in its particular way how the visual is accounted for by the analysis, so that any further development of video analysis will also depend on the way in which data are being transcribed or otherwise made accessible for analysis. Analysis will increasingly be able to draw on visual representation, with the result that written transcripts may lose their importance to such a degree as to potentially provide the way for a "visual mentality" in analysis – a mode of analysing that depends less on the written word than on visualisation and imagination. The ongoing technological changes may also affect the way – and are already now affecting the ways – in which studies are being presented (cf. for example Büscher, 2005) – however, for the time being, we still rely on the rather conventional forms of transcriptions and frame grabs. We need to consider that transcribing data is not just a preliminary phase of analysis. It forms an essential part of analysis. Transcribing generates observations that are fundamental to analytical inferences. As in research based on natural communicative activities or interviews, the transcription of video data is simply indispensable.

Conversation analysts and linguists have developed a wide array of transcription systems that transform the analytically important aspects of spoken language into textual representations (cf. Dittmar, 2002 for a comprehensive overview). Nevertheless, transcription systems for video data still remain in an experimental stage. "There is no general orthography used for the transcription of visual and tactile conduct". However, "over the years researchers have developed ad hoc solutions to locating and characterizing action" (Heath & Hindmarsh, 2002). These "ad hoc solutions" comprise of transcripts which basically consist of detailed description of what occurs in the video. There are also forms

of transcription for non-verbal aspects and their relation to the verbal behaviour of participants, "conduct score", and sketches of action sequences or "thick interpretative descriptions" in addition to representations of data that attempt to make use of the visual potential of video data.

4.6 Technical and legal restrictions

A further problem is the role of technology as both enabling opportunities and subjecting video research to certain limits. The very fact that the methodology is heavily reliant on technology ties it to future technological developments. This does not only raise the question of what impact the technology may have on social scientific video analysis (and vice versa). Video confronts the researcher with a number of technical and material challenges. Some of them concern the utilisation and application of camera, microphones, software etc. This technical part is still underestimated in the methodological discussion. Even if technology may not be considered an "autonomous actor" (Rammert & Schulz-Schaeffer, 2002), the devices employed definitely exert at least some influence upon the course of action in the research process. Without doubt, the instruments change the way in which we collect, construct, analyse and interpret our data. Methodological considerations rarely reflect this material issue because we are used to discussing methodology in much more abstract terms.

Hence, we may ask in what ways the instruments interfere with our analytical work. This question is especially pertinent for video analysis, which, compared to other qualitative methods, requires quite a lot of technology. Indeed, it may represent one of the most expensive and intricate ways to conduct qualitative research. Nonetheless, researchers still must purchase camcorders, tapes, tripods, microphones, etc. for the purpose of recording videos. In addition, analysing video data requires intelligent storage and cataloguing systems for raw data, powerful computer hardware and a series of software tools to digitalise, transcribe and analyse data and to present research results. Due to miniaturisation and popularisation, stripped down versions of video equipment have become ever more accessible for students. Nevertheless, the expense entailed from basic research equipment (somewhere between the equipment available for popular use and that used by television professionals) easily may amount to tens of thousands of Euros – in addition to the space, time and patience required to select the appropriate apparatus and software. Its handling requires also novel technical skills, quite unprecedented in qualitative inquiry. And, unlike other, more conventional forms of qualitative research, e.g. participant observation or interviews, preliminaries and preparation take considerably more time in qualitative video analysis. This may cause a certain delay in the analytical work, as quite extended portions of time are consumed by mere "craftsmanship". As a result, qualitative inquiry may even become more similar

to quantitative research. As in surveys, much work is invested in preparation, providing skills to the coders, handling the data-collections etc.

Finally, one of the most salient problems is the legal issues of video-recording. Like any other form of research, video analysis is subject to legal and ethical restrictions. This concerns questions such as: where are video analysts permitted to film, who is permitted to record social interactions for analytical purposes, which of these images may be stored, analysed or even used for publication and thereby disclosed to a wider audience. Although there have been intense debates on issues related to video recording in public places, their focus has been primarily on security issues and the questions of infringement on individuals' right to privacy. To our knowledge, there is no specific regulation for scientific video recordings at the moment (Garstka, 2004). To assure that some kind of "informed consent" exists seems to be, in the meantime, the most reasonable practical solution, although there may be cases in which this is virtually impossible (e.g. for each single pedestrian in wide-angle shots of public places). In addition, unlike for example the case of interview transcripts, anonymisation of moving images is a technically much more demanding task. Consequently, respecting the right to privacy in video analysis is a difficult and as yet unresolved problem, in addition to the legal implications of possible infringements on copy-rights and other rights that may be touched on by capturing, recording, analysing, storing or publishing video data of some sort (i.e. the fine distinction the legal systems draws in the field of data protection in general). Legally, the use of video for scholarly purposes of the kind described above oscillates between the individual freedom, which puts particular restrictions on "natural recording" practices, on the one hand, and the freedom of research, which puts no limits on the potential subjects of video recording to the extent that these may be of scientific relevance. Because of the tension between these two extremes, researchers often find themselves caught in a dilemma.

5. Conclusion

Modern societies are characterised by the increase of mediated and visualised forms of communication. These ongoing changes impact deeply on social relations. Mediated representations of reality tend to overlay the "natural" perceptions generated by the human senses. In other words, media products not only increasingly surround people in their everyday-life, but photographs, movies, TV-broadcasts, video-productions, and virtual computer-worlds influence their perception of reality fundamentally. In effect, humanities and social science researchers must answer questions like: To what extent do technical constructions of reality alter the forms of human self-interpretation and self-representation? How do the audiovisual media shift and extend the potential for the human construction and attribution of meaning? And not least, which new

requirements for the interpretation, and which new challenges to the understanding of meaning come into being in everyday-life (e.g. in the reception of mass media), as well as in social-scientific documentation and analysis of visual data?

Genre analysis and video hermeneutics have recently been developed as procedures for the generation, documentation, and understanding of audiovisual data. Both are closely related to the theory of the social construction of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The fundamental idea of these approaches is to consider social data as manifestations of the protagonists' perception and recognition of reality as well as of their self-representation and self-interpretation in everyday life (Schnettler & Knoblauch, 2007; Raab & Soeffner, 2008). Consequently, genre analysis and video hermeneutics as reconstruction procedures show how facts are fabricated by human beings under certain socio-historical conditions. Furthermore, they oblige the researcher to take on a self-reflexive stance and take into account his or her subjective presuppositions under which he himself or she herself constitutes the reality he or she is observing. – Only in this way can social scientists do justice to the ambitions of an ethnographic approach required for the forthcoming developments in the new visual sociology.

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